RICHARD STANFORD

Searching For Henri

An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
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Henri Dunant

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George suspected that the bar with its brightly lit windows bathing the dark stream of the outer boulevard in a sheet of flames would be a good place to start. He figured that any man who grew up among the idle rich of Geneva would find solace in a place like the Folies-Bergère regardless of his circumstances. Entering through the glass doors, he made his way past the crowd to the barmaid standing at the marble-top bar stocked with bottles of champagne, beer, a tray of oranges and two roses in a glass. The barmaid was talking to a gentleman who wore a top hat. She leaned forward to whisper into his ear. He smiled. She turned to George and asked him what he would desire. She was a striking creature, her short blonde hair revealing a full face and melancholy eyes. Her body was slim, on the tall side, with heavy breasts accentuated by a black velvet jacket trimmed tightly at her waist. George was aware of her small, sinuous movements. He asked for a Pernod.

George could see himself reflected in the large mirror that spanned the length of the bar. He looked past himself to the reflection of the full saloon – the patrons talking loudly, outbursts of shouting, laughter breaking through a murmur of hoarse voices. Fists pounded on the tables, stressing the end of the joke, making the glasses tinkle. Their hands folded on their stomachs or clasped behind their backs, the drinkers formed little groups, pressed one against the other. A large crystal chandelier hung over the throng, illuminating them in starbursts. George could not see anyone clearly through the smoky haze. All George had was a daguerreotype portrait, taken twenty years ago.

When the barmaid returned with his Pernod, George said, "May I ask you a question?" She smiled demurely. "I'm looking for Monsieur Henri Dunant. He's about fifty years old, from Geneva. He may, however, have changed his name."

"Are you a policeman?"

"No, I'm a journalist with *Die Ostschweiz*."

"A spurned lover or a husband on the run," she said, half expecting the plot to unfold before her.

"No," he said looking into the mirror, "but I suspect there may be a few of those in here." George took the daguerreotype print from inside his jacket and showed it to her.

"A thief?" she said, discerning through the grainy surface of the photograph that this Henri Dunant was a sophisticate; he had warm eyes, a determined smile, perfectly groomed hair and beard; and he wore a dress jacket with a black silk bow-tie. The man who had been in here several weeks ago was very different: "He asked for work, he was wearing a dirty black overcoat. I offered him a drink, on the house, but he declined…politely. He said he wouldn't mind an orange. I gave him one from the glass bowl. Men like him are escaping from something. In his sad, tired eyes I could see he was evading visions. He told me he'd been sleeping under the Pont des Invalides but with colder weather coming he was worried about his health. I directed him to a hospice on rue de Chazelles where he could have a room in return for services. He thanked me…he took my hand, brought it to his lips and kissed it. His hands were soft, not the hands of a working man. He smiled and left."

There was something in her telling that George

suspected – she recalled minute details but she was holding back; something was not right.

The man at the end of the bar came over to George with a suggestive swagger, asking to see the daguerreotype portrait. The man had a blond, amusing face, a silky beard and clear eyes. He was impeccably dressed in a long, black coat opened at the waist revealing a velvet vest and trousers. "If you are searching, you must be alone," the man said, "and if you are searching for another person, they are likely alone, too; and if you are searching for another you must be among strangers otherwise you would not be searching at all." George held back the urge to say something rude to the stranger: the French were always turning some mundane matter of the day into a philosophical rabbit-hole and it irritated George. Not because he couldn't keep up but because it was time-consuming. "I find it fascinating, this similarity between you and this man.," the stranger continued.

"He's not my twin, if that's what you're suggesting," said George. "And, he has aged since this photograph was taken."

"Then the photograph will not do you much good, will it," said the man handing it back to George and returning to his drink at the end of the bar. This fur-

ther irritated George, this dramatic exit stage right with a flourish.

The barmaid turned to George "The hospice on rue de Chazelles is run by a Madame Boche. If you look north from the Parc de Monceau you'll see a huge statue of a woman imprisoned in scaffolding. Walk towards her and you will find rue Chazelles." She smiled. "This is Paris, Monsieur. Believe in anything."

George spread a few coins on the bar and finished his Pernod, "My name is George Lloyd-Craig and I'm staying at the Hôtel Boncoeur. If you hear from him please let me know."

"I will."

"And you are?"

"Aline Monast," she said.

George smiled and walked through the crowd and out to the street. He was certain Aline had exaggerated and continued thinking so until he reached Parc de Monceau where scores of people stood in small groups or alone, motionless, all looking up to the sky to the north. When George saw it, he stopped, too. At first he thought it a mirage, a vague outline through

the coal smoke pouring from the chimneys. A gentle wind blew and like a painting it revealed itself.

It was a huge statue cicatriced in scaffolding. He raised his eyes slowly to take in all of its height, fifty metres into the grey sky, sparkling of raw copper so vast it absorbed all the light, the right hand extending up to the heavens gripping a torch. The head was enormous, culminating in a crown of daggers. It was a woman. There was nothing in her eyes to indicate her personality but the line of her huge mouth and eyelids told of a resolute female gaze that did not look down upon her subjects nor up to any God, but into the horizon. On the scaffold platforms were many tiny men riveting her together, polishing the flowing stola that swept up over her shoulder down to her feet.

George continued on, making his way across the park and down an alleyway to the rue de Chazelles. The buildings were lower here, no more than two storeys. The woman with the torch loomed larger, her shadow undulating over the buildings. George looked away from the statue and saw a short man standing in the middle of the street looking at him. He walked towards George with a limp.

"This is *Liberty Enlightening the World,*" he said as if he were introducing a stage act. "A gift to the United States, if they ever finish it. And what is this gentleman looking for?"

"Madame Boche's hospice."

The man held out his hand. Not a word can be uttered in this city without a price being attached to it. George dropped a couple of sous into it. The man pointed to a doorway three buildings along.

George knocked on the door, looked up to the rows of windows spanning the four floors, their black shutters with broken slats lending an air of desolation to the expanse of wall. The door was opened abruptly by a tall woman, her face carved with deep wrinkles. "Oui, Madame Boche." George showed her the photograph of Dunant. She stepped back and gestured to enter. He followed her up the stairs. Madame Boche told him Monsieur Dunant left about a week ago for the same reason that everyone else has left this building: no money, no hope. George looked up the empty tower of the stairwell, lit by gaslights. The last one on the fourth floor looked like a twinkling star in a black sky. They continued up the greasy steps, plaster showing through the scratched paint on the

walls reeking of human sweat. George could hear the rocking of a cradle through the gaps in the woodwork, the stifled cries of a child. There was a fight on the third floor with such a stomping that the floor trembled, furniture overturned, a racket of blows and curses. Madame Boche trudged past, oblivious.

They reached the fourth floor where the corridor led off into darkness. Madame Boche stopped and unlocked a yellowed door. George followed her inside. He looked round the room, its walnut chest with one drawer missing, a wicker chair and a little stained table with a cracked water jug on it. George noticed that the wicker chair was placed precisely at an angle to the window facing north thus offering a perfect framed image of the upper torso of the *Liberty* statue.

Pointing to the chair, George asked, "May I?"

She nodded."He would sit there for hours looking at her. Why is a man such as this wandering the streets of Paris as a beggar?"

"That's what I am trying to find out." George turned to her. "Why did you say 'a man such as this'?

Madame Boche said in a whisper: "Solferino."

"It was a terrible battle," said George without any idea of how terrible it was. He was only nine years old at the time. But he'd read Dunant's own account of the 1859 battle, *A Memory of Solferino*. That book had brought George to this wicker chair.

"All battles are terrible, sir, but they are more so when you lose your own."

"I'm sorry."

Madame Boche came into the room and looked out the window to the copper woman. "My husband, my brother, and a cousin. Not even their bodies made it back. Our lives together had only begun. In a moment it was all over, finished." Madame Boche turned to look sternly at George. "It is not right that the images he saw that day have been forgotten."

"That's probably why it's called a memoir. Memories are never forgotten. How do you know the book, Madame Boche?"

"Being the concierge of a hospice doesn't make me ignorant."

"I never thought that. The book was well known?"

"When five thousand Frenchman are killed in one

day, yes, it becomes well known. For some it was the only account of what had actually happened to their loved ones. And there are the walking wounded, over twelve thousand of them. You met Vinent on the street? He is one of them."

"There must be many others who need this room?"

"I'm hoping he might return. I can wait a few more weeks."

There was a knock on the door downstairs and Madame Boche left to attend to it. George walked around the room. A pair of muddy trousers hung on the back of the door. In the centre of the mantelpiece, between two cheap metal candlesticks lay two pawnbroker's slips. Why would Dunant have left these behind? Was he giving up any hope of having the money to buy back the items or was he shedding his past? George recalled reading *A Memory of Solferino*, horrific in each meticulous detail:

"…The stillness of the night was broken by groans, by stifled sighs of anguish and suffering. Heart-rending voices calling for help. When the sun came up on the 25th, it disclosed the bodies of men and horses covering the battlefield; corpses were

strewn over roads, ditches, ravines, thickets and fields; the approaches of Solferino were thick with the dead. The poor wounded men that were being picked up all day long were ghastly pale and exhausted. Some, who had been the most badly hurt, had a stupefied look as though they could not grasp what was said to them; they stared at one out of haggard eyes, but their prostration did not prevent them from feeling their pain. Others were anxious and excited by nervous strain and shaken by spasmodic trembling. Some, who had gaping wounds already beginning to show infection, were almost crazed with suffering. They begged to be put out of their misery and writhed with faces distorted in the grip of the death struggle…"

* * * * *

Walking across the park, George looked back at the *Liberty* statue receding below the rooftops. He crossed rue de Courcelles jumping over the gutter flowing like a dark brown putrid stream.

Two weeks ago he had gone to the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross perched on a hilltop overlooking the clear blue waters of Lake Geneva. It was a modest four storey government building devoid of ornamentation. George had

thought the story would be an easy one: he would interview Dunant, write the article and make his editor Conrad happy.

He asked the young woman at the front desk in the foyer if he could please speak with Henri Dunant. "Who?" George could not believe the response. He repeated the name. The woman shook her head. After some coaxing, he convinced the woman to fetch someone who may know the man he was seeking.

George looked at four framed daguerreotype photographs mounted on the wall behind the woman's desk. Four? What happened to the Committee of Five? The photographs were of very distinguished gentlemen, noblemen in their own right: Gustave Moynier, the current President, was in the middle; beside him General G.H Dufour and Dr. Théodore Maunier; and on the other side, Dr. Louis Appia. Where was Dunant? George heard the sound of rapid footsteps echoing down the hallway. Coming towards him was a tall man with a flowing moustache and intense brown eyes. He put his arm around George as if he were an intimate, and guided him out the front doors. Once outside, the man took his arm away and faced George. "What do you want?" he asked sternly.

"Dr.Appia?"

Appia nodded. "I repeat, what do you want?"

George told Appia who he was, the story he was planning to write and that speaking to Henri Dunant was essential. Appia looked to the sky while stamping the ground with his foot. "I knew this would happen." George wished only to tell the story of the founder of the International Red Cross, his inspiration and the genius of his original ideas. Instead he was in front of the building housing the organization Dunant founded, where his name has been seemingly obliterated, confronted by a man so angry that George feared he might punch him in the nose.

"Forget the story, Monsieur. The Red Cross is young and does not need anything to upset its progress."

"You realize, of course, your saying that makes it all the more imperative for me to write the story. How could anything about this man upset the Committee's progress? Where is Monsieur Dunant?"

Appia sighed deeply and shook his head. "Last I heard he was in Paris but I don't know exactly where."

"There is no picture of him on the wall. Are you planning to destroy all copies of *A Memory of Solferino* to finish the job? I already have *that* story. So, Dr. Appia?"

"I truly don't know where he is in Paris. I'll give you the name of a former diplomat there who worked with Henri when he was first seeking audiences with heads of state." Appia scribbled out a name on a pad of paper and handed it to George.

"But what happened here? Why did he leave? Why has his name been erased?"

"There was a scandal."

"What? A woman?"

"No, no, no, nothing like that. Bankruptcy. He spent over ten years travelling throughout Europe, attending meetings, writing letters, visiting diplomats and presidents, establishing this very complex organization. It took him two years alone to write *A Memory of Solferino*. It became a best-seller within weeks. But in all that time he didn't appoint anyone to take care of his business interests. He had land and water holdings in Algeria and Italy. He was worth millions at one point and he forgot it all. He left it

all for this," said Appia gesturing with a sweep of his hand to the building. "By '74, he was bankrupt and there were lawsuits. Investors wanted their money back but there was no money there. There was nothing."

"I still don't understand. Why didn't the Committee hire him?"

"Monsieur Moynier wanted nothing to do with a scandal such as this. It would be a black-eye against the organization at a time when we need support from many governments. Governments don't like bankruptcy."

"Is this Moynier's doing?"

"I cannot speak to you anymore. I must go." Appia turns to walk back into the building.

"Don't you find it odd, Dr.Appia that an organization devoted to the assistance of any human being in desperate need should turn its back on the very man who conceived of the whole enterprise in the first place?"

Appia stopped. "Find him," he said, and hurried into the building.

Appia's diplomat contact in Paris knew nothing of Dunant's whereabouts. George now found himself on a winding street near La Maison des Arts, following Madame Boche's directions. He turned a corner hoping to see a street sign but there was nothing to identify this narrow wasteland of alleyways running off between the blackened walls. One alleyway led into another, each narrower than the one before until finally he emerged into a small courtyard. Four storeys above, a narrow opening admitted dull grey sunlight that cast over a storefront of dolls. The dark windows of Au Bébé Bon Marché reflected a circle of large dolls. Under the canopy were a couple of dozen smaller dolls each fitted tightly within open packing boxes as if laying in coffins. Did the store's repair services include reviving dead dolls?

Across from the doll shop three globes clicked in the gentle wind curling through the courtyard entrance. In the pawnbroker's window was an easel holding a painting that seemed to dance with vibrant colours, a dizzying array of swirls leaping off the canvas.

George stepped inside the pawnshop where there were more paintings covering the entire length of a wall and up to the ceiling. One painting of flower-

ing apple trees scaling a hill; another of deep, fresh undergrowth, a seated woman, a child, a dog, a butterfly net; a maid with her charge – blue, green, pink, white, dappled with the sun; the Seine and telegraph wires and the springtime sky; a Parisienne with red lips in a blue jersey; a bare-shouldered dancer painted in yellow, green, and rust, posed laying back on a fauteuil. In front of him was a glass display counter, its shelves filled with rings and necklaces, watches and pendants, ornate vases and leather gloves. From the back room George could hear an animated discussion growing louder. A man burst through the beaded curtain, wearing glasses, engaged in an argument with his newspaper.

"Monsieur Marescot?"

"Yes, you have found him," he said without taking his eyes off the front page of *Le Figaro – Mercredi 22 avril 1885.* "Can you believe these bastards annexing Tahiti? What do we need an island of sand for? To fill flower pots? Who will pay for this imperialist stupidity? Dupes like us can't find it on a map because it isn't on any map."

George handed Marescot the pink slips. "Am I in the right place?" said George, walking over to exam-

ine the paintings. "These are odd for a pawnshop," said George as he leaned in close to one of the paintings.

"When people sell off their last possessions to buy a loaf of bread, one needs art to elevate one's spirits."

"An expensive hobby."

"These artists will be famous one day, especially that one – Monet," he said pointing to a landscape painting. "Today they are considered fools by the *Salon*. But when they do become famous, these paintings will make me rich, so this is not a hobby. Now, where did you get these?" he said, holding up the pawn slips.

George told him of his search for Monsieur Dunant.

"Yes, I remember him well and I know who he is," said Marescot. "One moment." He went to the wooden cabinet behind the counter. "He took particular interest in the two Degas paintings over there. The nudes." Angled towards the rays of sunlight the paintings were studies of nude women who appeared to be shrouded in fog: one stepping out of a bath; the other drinking a cup of chocolate being served by a fully dressed maid; both with their backs to the

painter. The women were short, opulent, and lit from within by a night-light, flesh unadorned, their granular rendering blending into the dim backgrounds. "And Monsieur Dunant was interested in these?"

"He liked them all. He has a very modern eye." Marescot returned with two small articles that he placed gently on the glass counter. "I will keep them until he can buy them back. That is why they are not on display. Most get thirty days and that's it."

"May I?" Marescot nods. George opens a slim black case. Inside is an elegant medal - a five star degree hanging from a red velvet ribbon.

"He is a Chevalier of the *Légion d'honneur*, awarded to him by the Emperor in '65," said Marescot. "A man must be truly desperate to pawn such an item."

"Or he is shedding himself of his past." The other item was a gold-plated pocket watch with a gold chain. George snapped open the lid. The watch was still keeping time, an inscription engraved on the inside of the lid: To Henri/S.E.D 1848. George closed the lid. "Do you have any idea where I might find him?"

"No. I gave him a hundred francs for these, more

than I would've given anyone else. If you do find him, tell him I will keep them for him."

Before leaving George stopped to look at the wall of paintings. He looked closely. "May I buy one of these?"

"Bien sûr. Which ones?"

"Well, I'm not an art expert."

"You don't have to be. It's whatever you like."

George pointed: "That one, *s'il vous plait*."

"Ah yes, Monet. *Bridge at Bougival*." George pointed to another. "Oui, Degas. You realize this is a pencil and wash drawing."

George knew the technique having done it himself when he was younger. "Yes. And I know the subject…*en passant*. And the nudes, please."

"They are studies, you understand."

George nodded. Marescat wrapped each painting in thick brown paper tied with twine. "Shall we say two hundred francs?"

"We shall," said George, counting out the money onto the glass counter.

A letter from Conrad was waiting for George at the front desk of the Hôtel Boncoeur. Conrad was giving him one more night in Paris. If he didn't find out anything new there would be no story. It had been difficult enough to get Conrad to agree to the idea. However, Peter had instructed him well in how to prepare for the robust questions an editor might fire at him and George had answered most of them except for one: Where is Dunant? Conrad knew well enough the implications of such a story but *Die Ostschweiz* couldn't afford the cost of George gallivanting over Europe looking for a man who did not wish to be found, which made George all the more curious.

He went to his room and began to write his observations in the hope he could convince him that he was making progress. It was, of course, a lie. With his account of a bar, a statue and a pawnshop, he may as well have been a tourist writing a travelogue. And there was the city, its unrelenting sounds coming through his open window from the unanimous night – the rattling of carriages, horses' hooves clopping the wet cobblestones, the water gurgling down the

gutters, the laughter curling up from the café across the street, the idle chatter of couples walking arm-in-arm, the high-pitched notes from an organ grinder and a woman singing out:

Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot,
Prête-moi ta plume
Pour écrire *un mot.*
Ma chandelle est morte,
Je n'ai plus de feu.
Ouvre-moi ta porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu.

Au clair de la lune,
Pierrot répondit :
Je n'ai pas de plume,
Je suis dans mon lit.
Va chez la voisine,
Je crois qu'elle y est,
Car dans sa cuisine
On bat le briquet.

Beyond, as far as his eye could see, the sparkle of a million gaslight stars from the streets and the rooms and the bars, the sparks spiraling from the chimneys, the matches igniting cigarettes, and the thought that

somewhere in this constellation, a man who should be the most famous man in the world is inexplicably and utterly alone, penniless and forgotten.

George was jolted from his by a sharp knock at the door. He looked at his watch - one AM. He jumped from the chair and opened the door. The barmaid's blonde hair shone under the gaslight. "Come with me," she said.

George closed his notebooks, retrieved his coat. "Where are we going?" he asked, following Aline out to the streets.

"You never thought it odd that a man in Henri's state of poverty would walk into the Folies-Bergère?"

George noted that Aline had referred to Dunant by his first name. "You said he was looking for work."

"Ah, the first of many lies. He was looking for me."

"You're lovers?"

"Heavens, no. We are cousins. He came to me for help and I treated him much like the rest of the family did, only I gave him an orange."

George could not resist looking at her swaying stride and the secret of her lips. He chose not to ask questions. He allowed himself to be led, willing to take the fanciful risk that maybe she might be leading him into an ambush where he would be robbed by her lover. They paused at an intersection to wait for a procession of carriages to pass. They crossed the boulevard, her pace quickening. He hurried to keep up.

"We grew up together in Geneva," she continued. "He was ten years older than me but we were always good friends – and he indulged me. He behaved more like an uncle. He took me to the opera. He loved Mozart," her voice trailing off. "My family moved to Paris but we kept in touch…until Solferino. After that he stopped writing to me. A few years later his book was published and I read it. It was a very different voice from the Henri I knew. A very different one."

"What did his family do to him?"

"They threw him off."

They crossed Quai des Tuileries and down to the black waters of the Seine, flowing with old corks, vegetable peelings and a swirl of floating garbage

caught in an eddy. A short distance downstream was the arch of a bridge from where they could hear the rumble of passing carriages and omnibuses, where all they could see of the city were its roofs as though they were looking up from the bottom of a hole. From under the bridge on the embankment they could see barrels of fire.

"That's Pont Solferino," said Aline, pointing. "It's ironic, no? It should be called Pont Dunant but instead they named it after the battle."

"You think he's there?"

"I don't know. But if he is, I'm bringing him home as I should've done in the first place."

They walked along the embankment towards the barrels of fire, passing men huddled up against the wall, their eyes hidden.

"I don't understand why your family and Moynier treated him in that way. He may have been bankrupt but look what he created."

They continued on while regarding each huddled shadow along the wall as closely as possible.

"Bankruptcy means a great deal in polite society. He didn't have the air of respectability. And he never married."

"Why is that?"

"Why do you think?"

"I don't know. Traumatized by the experience in Solferino I would expect."

Aline carried on in silence for several steps then said casually, "Yes, maybe that."

They carried on along the embankment, nearing the bridge and the fires, the smell of dead fish permeating the night air. "Henri travelled all over Europe while he was attempting to secure signatories to the Covenant of the Red Cross," she said. "He met diplomats, attachés, army generals, presidents, kings. Along the way he had liaisons with several men. He had a long relationship with an Austrian chargé d'affaires and they were discovered, in a hotel room where a conference was being held. That was it. Moynier was never going to tolerate that so he told Henri to leave the Committee – quietly or he would find himself in prison for treason. Henri

didn't want to harm the image of the Red Cross, so he left. The shame of bankruptcy was a front."

They reached the underside of the bridge where groups of men clustered around several fires burning in large metal barrels. Suddenly one of the men bolted towards Aline, his eyes flaring, "What are you doing here, little whore. And you, what are you? Her pimp?"

George quickly stepped between Aline and the enraged man. "It's all right, my friend. We're looking for someone."

"Friend? You're not my friend. You're the police? Yes, you're the police. Lift up your skirt, you little slut," he said menacing closer to Aline. "Let's see what you have under there."

"No, no, we're not. We…" George shouted then froze when he saw the flash of a blade. The man lunged at Aline with a knife. George grabbed Aline by the arm, pulling her away. The man advanced on them. He flashed the knife into George's face. "We mean no harm. Please put it away," pleaded George. The man started to laugh. "Ah yes, I have myself a chicken." Suddenly, another man jumped in front of George, "Stop it, Compeau!" Compeau held the

knife out stiffly. "I'll get you next time," he said with a laugh and walked away.

"You people should be more careful," said the man. "This is not a place for an idle stroll." The man had a full black beard which camouflaged the nervous tick of his upper lip. His eyes darted back-and-forth but he did not slur his speech and George believed he was not a drunk.

George showed the man the daguerreotype. "We're looking for this man. He goes by the name of Henri."

The man tipped the print towards the firelight. "Ah yes. Henri. He's been here many times."

"Is he here now?" asked Aline eagerly.

"No, he left about two weeks ago."

"How long was he here?"

"Sometimes for a week, sometimes for a month, he'd come and go. He wasn't like any of these other men. He wasn't here because of alcohol or opium. Why are you interested?"

"He's my cousin," said Aline.

"Ah…"

The man chuckled when George told him who Henri was. "Well, I suppose that makes sense. He often treated these men for their cuts and bruises and told them to stop fighting amongst themselves. Some of these poor souls have survived one war or another with their brains baked. Henri talked with them endlessly. He had the demeanor of an aristocrat. I could never quite figure him out."

The man had no idea where Henri had gone or if he would ever come back. George gave the man a few coins. "He talked to me, too. I was at Solferino. This is what is left of me." The man drifted off into the smoke of the fires.

George and Aline continued along the quai, passing under Pont des Invalides where there were more barrels of fire. They paused to look at some of the men but their stern gazes told them to move along. It was a hideous image to George - while Paris was expanding, its old neighbourhoods turned upside down by the widening of boulevards, there were people such as these who were being buried in its wake.

Aline led George from the Seine and through a maze of streets. Her gaze was fixed on the ground until she tucked her hand into George's arm and pulled herself closer to him, their heads touching.

George had long since lost track of time. It was the darkness of morning but lights were still on everywhere: from cafés and lamp posts and apartments casting their beams to the street below. It made it easy to see Aline's profile bathed in fluttering shades of black and white. He realized he had seen her before in one of the paintings in Marescot's shop – one he did not purchase.

"Yes, it was probably me," she said to his question. "I'm a model for many of the artists in Paris. The man who spoke to you at the Bar, he is one of them. Edgar Degas. The money is all right, but sitting perfectly motionless for three hours can drive one quite mad. Did you purchase any?

"Yes. But sadly not the one of you. I should go back. I had this feeling that they were painted in the actual locale. I saw one of a party in a patio restaurant next to a river. Were you in that one, too?

"Yes. That was Renior's Boating Party. I'm the one leaning on the railing with the flowery hat. But there too much bustle and noise in places like that. He did a sketch of the scene then painted all the characters and composed the canvas from models, like me."

"Sometimes nude?"

"Sometimes. Degas is not my lover if that's what you're thinking. There is an art to being a model. It's very difficult and not because you must be still. You must recreate in your body the image the artist is trying to achieve. When you fail, they get angry. Artists are an impatient lot."

George trusted that Aline knew where she was going because he was utterly lost. He didn't mind being under her control, guided through pools of light and darkness, the silver clasps of Aline's cloak shining under the gaslights. From the moment he walked into the Folies-Bergère to see her facing him and facing away from him simultaneously with her back reflected in the mirror, he saw a woman as he had never seen one before, able to see her sensuous lips and at the same time her soft blonde hair cascading down her neck.

Aline stopped at a door, unlocked it and walked into a cobblestone courtyard. From there, she led the way up a spiral of drunken stairs to the top floor of the building. She unlocked another door and beckoned him into her apartment. Light came in through a small window, touching the curtains, the fabric of the bedclothes and the outlines of a bookshelf. She made no move to turn on the gaslight. Instead,

George felt her hands loosening his cravat before he had sloughed off his topcoat. He tried to undo the silver clasps of her cloak as she pulled him towards the bed. He could hear her breathing as he pulled the fillets of cloth that held her dress together. She hunched her shoulders into him as the dress fell away. In the darkness he could see only her eyes and feel her hot mouth. Without taking their hands away from each other's body, they managed to struggle free of their cloths and onto the bed. He did not bother to remove her garters or stockings, but took her in his arms, kissed her and penetrated her velvety wet body.

Perfect lassitude. George could now see better in the dark: the cracks in the high ceiling, a distorted rectangle of light pulled across the wall, moving over the irregularities of a picture frame and clothes draped over the open door of an armoire. He moved his arm from where it was trapped under Aline's back and she shifted languorously, losing herself in and around his long limbs. He touched her cheek lightly with his hand. She took it into her own, cupped it and held it to her mouth, and she looked at him with the same wide-eyed gaze she held for him behind the bar only this time he heard the word *chéri* whispered in her lazy voice. She was warm against him and he

felt the lassitude slipping, giving way to renewed caresses and urgency.

Morning light burst through the lace curtains. George rose up slowly and looked to the empty bed and the small room. "I suppose that's the way it happens in this city," he said. It saddened him that there was not at least a morning *adieu*, the chance to change the schedule for the day or for his life. Now he was just another man who had stumbled into the Folies-Bergère.

He didn't hurry to get dressed, hoping that Aline's absence might be temporary. But once his shirt was buttoned and his topcoat on, there seemed little to do except leave. He went down the stairs, through the cobbled courtyard and into the busy street. He crossed the street to take a good look at the building where he'd spent the night. It was a brave imitation of the sturdy apartment houses of the Faubourg St-Germain, only falling into decay. He looked around and realized that Aline had taken him through a maze in the darkness and he was lost.

He found a café, ordered some breakfast and with directions from the waiter, he made his way back to the Hôtel Boncoeur.

There was an envelope waiting for him at the hotel's front desk. He opened it in his room. There were the notes from Conrad on his previous filing and a letter Conrad had forwarded from Emma.

Atholstan House
Sherbrooke Street
Montréal, Québec.

Dearest George,

It has been so long since we have heard from you, dear Brother. I do hope you are all right. The last news we had was a telegram from Monsieur Bresson telling us you were in Paris pursuing a story. Do tell me everything. You must make an effort to write more often. It's not as if I can walk down the hallway and bang on your door. I miss that.

I am doing well here in Montréal. I am in the employ of the editor and publisher of The Daily Star *and residing in his sybarite mansion which he calls Atholstan House. Mr.Graham has kindly given me my own*

room on the second floor overlooking Sherbrooke Street. From my bay windows I watch the constant bustle that plays out all day and night on the street and beyond – hansom cabs, men smoking cigars, bleary-eyed students trudging to McGill campus, and all the women are in crinoline as if they are going to a party, every single day. People cluster at the entrance of the Carlton Hotel hailing hansoms, the hearty ones make their way to the museum and on Sundays there is a church for everyone, including the Unitarians, and I can hear the blends of organ music. This is utterly unlike the only street in Lennox where everyone is dressed in work clothes and their hands are covered in their labours.

In the evenings here, Mr.Graham is host to a steady parade of fellow journalists, writers, artists and actors, men and women, who drink and argue until the morning hours. I don't know how Mr. Graham does it. Through these people I have been introduced to a very different world from the one I knew. Things are far more complex than I had ever imagined.

Now that school is over for the summer, I spend the rest of my time at The Daily Star. *Mr. Graham has been very encouraging of my work, exposing me to all aspects of the operations of the newspaper. Of late I*

have been researching reports on the smallpox epidemic. Over 800 people have died this month and the end seems nowhere in sight. Immunizations are being done on a massive scale across the city and those who refuse are warned they could face prison. I am also doing proof reading, copy editing and I have made quite an impression with my "Notes from Windsor Station" column. I often work late into the night but that is not much different from our days at The Sentinel*, is it. So many nights we had, so many.*

Father does keep me up-to-date and he sends me the weekly edition. It's a fine newspaper Father has created. He found another journalist to replace you. Jason Darrah is his name. Arrived from Ireland a few months ago and fancies himself a novelist. Father is prepared to put up with that pretense for the moment as long as he does his job. Peter is very busy reporting the many circuit court cases as well as the criminal trials in the Sherbrooke Courthouse. Andrew is now helping Cal with the typesetting and Father has brought on another apprentice to help Raleigh. The Sentinel *is thriving. I often wonder if we should have stayed. Maybe not you as you always had your eyes set elsewhere. But sometimes I do think about going back, helping Father and Leah, who works as hard as he does. I suppose we*

are not to think about our pasts, they are the fancies of childhood and not to be journeyed back. Peter once told me of the excitement he felt with being a part of such as new enterprise as The Sentinel. *Perhaps that is what I miss.*

Have you become a spy? If you have, for whom? Are you going to incite a war? Are you searching for Isadore? How could you find her in such as large city as Paris? If you are a spy, should we write in code, don't you think? Isn't that how it is done?

Please try to keep in touch more, George. Father won't say it but I know he worries about you, as we all do. Do write and if you are a spy, make it be for the Americans. I hear they are so much better at it.

Your loving sister,

Emma.

* * * * *

George wrote a long letter to Emma recounting his travels over the last few months and mailed it next morning. He also sent a separate package containing the paintings to his apartment in Geneva. He set out across Le Pont de L'Europe down Rue de Rome and approached the plaza in front of Gare St.Lazare.

Among the crowd of people coming out of the station his eyes locked on one woman: she wore a cloak with fur at the hem and cuffs, a broad-brimmed hat with a veil; she was attractive and elegant. He looked at her obliquely, saw her open her eyes wide and raise her gloved hand to her mouth. Was she trying to hide her face? For reasons he could not understand George allowed himself to consider that this might be Isadore. He has done this before – the faces of strangers striving to become intimate. Is it possible, he wondered, that we respond instinctually to those of the same blood? The woman came closer. It became a game for him now, holding up a few steps, pacing slower, shifting a little to the left, straight towards her, eyes downcast, shifting back to the right, picking up his pace, faster now to get past her. In that moment he could not recall if his mother ever looked him in the eye. More vivid were his memories of Leah bathing him, reading books to him, teaching him languages while his mother retreated into her room for days and weeks on end.

On the platform at Gare St-Lazare, several locomotives huffed steam, sunlight pouring down through the canopy of glass. George looked up to the rafters lined with hundreds pigeons seemingly deaf to the constant din. Columns of blue smoke curled into the

sunlight. A conductor blew his whistle. The pigeons rose as one, streaming out from under the glass roof in a great beating of wings, wheeling, banking, swooping, turning, a black wave rising to the blue sky beyond. George did not move. The locomotive hissed, smoke billowed from its stack, energy rumbled from the engine, the wheels strained for motion. The conductor blew his whistle louder. George did not move. The conductor gestured madly for George to get on the train. "Of course," said George. "Solferino." He turned, ran down the platform and out of the station.

He quickly made his way to rue de Chazelles. Crossing Parc de Monceau, he saw Lady Liberty unchanged, still resolute and shrouded in scaffolding. When he turned the corner onto rue de Chazelles, he saw him sitting on a bench smoking a pipe near the front of Madame Boche's hospice. Maurice looked up and smiled at George.

"You were both at Solferino," said George. "He would've confided in you."

"He does not wish to be found, Monsieur."

"I don't want to harm him. I want to tell the world about him."

Maurice lifted the pants on his left leg to reveal a wooden stump and peg. "I lay in the battlefield for two days. I prayed for death. I couldn't crawl to a bayonet to finish myself off. There were scores of men dying in different languages. At night, the screaming was loudest. But as the hours passed, there were fewer of them. An Austrian doctor came, looked at my uniform, and walked away. On the third day, they came for what was left of us. They thought I was dead so they threw me into a wagon of corpses. They realized what they'd done so they tossed me into another wagon. I passed out. When I woke up, Dunant was treating what remained of my leg. There must have been a hundred of us in this field hospital at the back of a warehouse. It stank of rotten potatoes and death. He did everything he could to keep us alive. He never slept…never rested. There were a few old women from the village who helped. Gangrene set in. When the doctor finally came, he plied me with whiskey but it didn't do much good. Dunant held me in his arms, whispering to me, 'You will live, you will live'. White pain strangled my body. He held me like a father holds his son. So here I am, what is left of me. I lost my leg and I lost my mind but I owe Dunant my life."

"People should know this story, Maurice."

"You know, sometimes when I'm lying in bed I feel my leg, when I reach to touch it, it's not there. It's like having a phantom leg."

Maurice looked up to the face of Lady Liberty. What had he seen in her? What lost woman did she represent to him? A lover who would have nothing more to do with him because he was a cripple? A brother who could not stand the sight of weakness? A mother? Yes, there may have been a mother, and a father, who were both ashamed. He would rather pass his time here at the feet of a woman who would not look down to him. He could watch as she was assembled, smoothed, riveted, polished, while never casting judgement upon those who gathered at her feet. She would only look to the horizon in anticipation of what was to come.

George saw Maurice lost in his memories. He thanked Maurice, wished him good luck and headed off down the street.

"Monsieur," Maurice called out. George turned back to him. "Heiden."

"Switzerland?"

Maurice nodded. George returned to him and

took his hand into his. "Be true to him, that's all I ask." George promised.

Stepping off the train at the Heiden Station a few days later, George was surrounded on three sides by the Appenzell Alps and the sweet aroma of Lake Constance shimmering in the distance. He walked into the village. The light, he thought, familiar in its sharpness, would have drawn Dunant here like a creature instinctively finding its natural habitat.

George did not have that much time. Conrad had read his notes, the opening paragraphs of his article and while Dunant had still not been located, he found the story of the search and its illusive protagonist to be compelling, worth the expense of another train ticket. But if his article was to be published, George had to find its elusive subject.

A stranger on the street directed George to the local hospice. Unless Dunant had come into a fortune in the past three days, a hospice was the logical place to start. It was a three-storey building located off a public square, nestled within a copse of trees. The building was pure white, immaculately clean with each window of the upper floors framed by green shutters. George rang the front door bell and a few moments later a concierge appeared. George asked

if Henri Dunant lived here. The concierge looked George up and down as if he was analyzing an autopsy specimen, and after several uncomfortable seconds the concierge finally said, "I'm sorry, he has left."

George was at least glad his hunch was correct. "For the day?"

"No, for much more than a day," he said as he began closing the door.

George stepped forward, raising his hand to hold the door back. "I am with *Die Ostschweiz* and I must know where I can find Monsieur Dunant."

The concierge raised his eyebrows. "If you do not step away, sir, I will call the police who, are nearby." George looked over his shoulder and saw a police station. In that instant the door slammed shut.

He walked down the street and found a park from which he saw the crystal blue water of Lake Constance in the distance. Where was he to look now? He was finding it difficult to rationalize his search for a man who clearly did not want to be exposed to the public. Yet George could not easily accept that a man like Dunant who had made such a significant contri-

bution to the evolution of humanistic thinking could be lost to the dust of history. His mind then began to wander to Aline and the last time he had seen her. Before he had taken the train to Heiden, he had gone to the Folies-Bergère. Aline embraced him and her eyes swelled up with joy. She said she was sorry for having left him in the morning but she had to leave for a modeling assignment for one of the Impressionist artists. When he told her where he was going, she said: "This is becoming more than an assignment for you, isn't it?"

"Maybe." He promised to telegraph her as soon as he found out anything. She kissed him.

"My, my," said Degas, sitting at his usual seat at the end of the bar. "You have betrayed me, Aline."

"*Silence*, Edgar," she said.

She kissed him again and he still felt it.

A sailboat floated by on the lake. "I understand you have been looking for me, Monsieur Lloyd-Craig," came a voice from behind George. He turned quickly, thinking this was a dream. But there he was, rather formidable, tall in his dark cloak, white cuffs over his wrists, a box-like smoking cap crowning his brow,

a fine white beard spread in cloud wisps around his chin. Stormy intense eyes considered George. The skin on his face was darkened, leathery, not tanned from the sun but weathered by the wind. For the moment, all the questions George had planned to ask dropped from his mind.

"I am very sorry to have caused you so many difficulties," said Henri Dunant, in a refined voice. "I had not counted on your perseverance. Come, let us walk together."

Henri led the way out of the park towards a path in a marching stride. George did not detect any weakness or a loss of self-awareness in him, rather a focus on the path ahead, alacrity to everything around him. He stopped at a public fountain for some water and continued walking as if he had a destination in mind – a person to visit, a meal to be eaten, an appointment to be kept. It took all of George's energy to keep up to Henri's tireless pace. It was clear that the last ten years of his life had been spent perfecting this discipline which now took them down a gentle slope of hay grass, pasture, rocky outcrops, through to the valley floor and the shores of Lake Constance.

"I know what you are going to ask me," Dunant finally said. "I read newspapers, including yours. The

wonderful thing about Paris is that there are a dozen newspapers all of which end up abandoned in cafés or libraries, where I spend much of my time. You might say keeping in touch with old friends," he said with a wry smile.

"You slept under a bridge in the middle of winter?" George asked.

"Yes, in this cloak." Henri turned away and began another march. They continued along the shoreline of the lake, Henri letting the water lap over his boots. "I know nothing about business or finance. Never did. The companies were a family inheritance that my older brother was supposed to manage but he was smart – he became a doctor. I went to see the Emperor to have him sign a document for the water rights to one of our properties in Algeria. I arrived in Solferino in a carriage. I stepped into another world of 40,000 dead or dying men. Battlefields? What did I know of battlefields? My body went numb. Men with gaping wounds, some cut in half, others riddled with bullets, and hundreds more crying for help… for their loved ones. The wonderful work of God in the guidance of bullets. I heard more mothers' names that day than I had ever thought existed. The ground was red. Everything went dark."

Henri suddenly broke off and walked along the shore. George caught up to him and they continued walking. George saw that Henri's face had become grim, his eyes moist, the world shut out.

It was sundown when they returned to Heiden. Henri stopped at a street corner. "There is an inn down this street where you'll find a room for the night. I will return to the hospice. Tomorrow we will continue our talk."

"You won't walk off somewhere?" asked George.

Dunant looked at him, bemused. "I might. I suppose it's a chance you'll have to take. Isn't that what journalists do?" and he walked away.

George was exhausted, eager for a good night's rest and time to prepare questions for the next day. He slept soundly, waking to a dull, rainy morning. He looked out the window – the hills were shrouded in mist. On the street below he saw Dunant in his cloak, seemingly impervious to the steady rain. In his furtive manner, Dunant resembled a spy as if he were stalking an enemy agent. He would know of spies from his days in the corridors of bureaucratic power. George had read archived newspaper accounts that Dunant was suspected of being a spy by those who

thought his ideas of humanistic responsibility to be madness.

George grabbed his coat and hat, hurried from the room and met Dunant on the street. They set off up another pathway to the hills. After exchanging a few pleasantries they walked in silence for the rest of the day, along the crest to the village of Walzenhausen, continuing on through the hills until George had lost all sense of where they were. Dunant, on the other hand, strode determinedly, confident of where he was going, depositing George at the same spot near the inn at sundown. George allowed Dunant his silence, realizing that this was how he had spent much of the past ten years and that he would break it only when he was ready.

The walking continued the following day and for several days after that. This is what walking does, George thought: one loses one's sense of place and time. The weather cleared, the sun shone brightly. George was getting impatient but he felt it best not to force Dunant into anything, not to badger him with questions. He observed Dunant closely and saw in him what he had seen in Compeau, the man who had attacked Aline; and in Maurice of rue de Chazelles: eyes which were glaring and dark. The eyes of most

people dance amidst their surroundings, picking out, taking in, aware; but those of Compeau, Maurice, and Dunant, and of the men he had seen under Pont Solferino were of a different ilk. Their eyes were fixed straight ahead, never seeming to be bothered with superfluous detail. What they had seen had changed them irrevocably, altering the substance of their bodies, the flow of blood through their veins and the manner in which their brains record reality, at the same time unleashing demons in the night, where sleep is the hour between the dog and the wolf. There was a spirit of serenity around people who face the possibility of death every day. George had seen it before when he had spoken to coal miners. Something of that harsh reality made the contemplation of mortality calmly endurable.

In the aftermath of Solferino, Dunant somehow had the wit to collect himself. He organized conferences, met with kings and generals, signed international treaties, wrote a best-selling book, experienced great art, witnessed the construction of the world's largest man-made sculpture, and conceived of one of the most original ideas in the history of human affairs. And so now, he walks.

Finally, sometime during the fifth or sixth day,

Dunant broke his silence as though resuming a conversation of only moments ago.

"I went to Berlin in 1863 and met with King Wilhelm of Prussia. He was to be a signatory to the Geneva Convention of the Red Cross. In private, he told me of Bismarck's plan to carry Prussia to the peak of conquest and his attempts to thwart him. He has not succeeded. There are many calamitous days to come. The weapons of destruction being created will wreak havoc upon soldier and civilian alike."

"There are peace activists who say that the Red Cross should be working to prevent such calamities rather than patching up the soldiers only to fight again," said George.

Dunant stared intently ahead. "Yes, I founded an organization not devoted to peace. Why if we let it run amok, the Red Cross can single-handedly start the next war. That is one of my curses. I am bankrupt. I am therefore irresponsible. I am a spy. I am an *agent provocateur*. I grew weary of it all. Is it any wonder that I wander?"

Dunant glared at George, turned quickly and marched up the hill. George now feared he might lose him. George caught up to him. "I'm sorry, Mon-

sieur Dunant. I wasn't going to ask you about…"

"Of course you were. About not being married? You're a journalist. I may be isolated from the world but I'm more than familiar with its ways. You asked me about the Degas' paintings. That means you were in Marescot's shop which means you saw Madame Boche which means you met my cousin Aline which also means you met Maurice, the only person in Paris who knows where I am. Write whatever you want, Monsieur. I've read it all," and Dunant was gone over the crest of the hill. George knew this time it would be best not to follow him. He returned to the inn and passed a sleepless night fearing that his work had gone up in smoke. At the first glimmer of sunrise he looked out the window and was relieved.

Henri's mood was less intense and he walked in a more leisurely pace. "Did Maurice tell you of his phantom leg?"

"Yes, he mentioned it."

"You lose many things in a war. Lives. Legs. I have a phantom mind. It's the mind I had before Solferino, the one that made it possible to walk through my world. But I lost that mind there. Sometimes when I'm lying down I think I can feel it, my old mind, but

when I reach out to touch it, it's not there and I am left with this lame one, the one that limps around in my skull."

"You had enough of a mind left to conceive the idea of the neutrality of the Red Cross, the idea that doctors and nurses under its flag would treat any soldier regardless of nationality. That was a master stroke, sir."

"At Solferino I saw doctors walking away from dying soldiers simply because they were in the uniform of another country. They couldn't see them as human, only as the enemy. If you look into the eyes of an enemy, you will see a human being who should not suffer. Once we come around to that way of thinking, it becomes possible to stop the slaughter in the first place. You can't be an enemy one moment and a human being the next. The people who serve under the flag of the Red Cross are the true advocates of peace. Each life they save increases the possibility of a new way of thinking."

Henri was silent for the rest of their walk that day and they parted in silence. George slept fitfully that night and in the morning crawled out of bed to look out the window. Henri was not there. The past week of hard walking had taken its toll on George

and while he was eager to continue exploring Henri's mind, he was thankful for a day of rest and time to write up his notes. The next morning Henri was still not waitng. George rested for a second day, using the time to begin writing the article.

The third morning without Henri's presence was another matter. George immediately set out for the hospice and knocked on the front door. The concierge opened the door, his expression still dour. He leaned back to the hallway table and handed George an envelope. The door slammed shut.

The envelope was addressed to George in a clear, elegant script.

10 May 1885

'Dear George,

By the time you read this I will be in the midst of another wandering. Please do not bother Maurice or anyone else – no one knows where I am going. How could they when I don't myself. I appreciate your professional responsibilities and I admire your tenacity. You have seen all of my world, you have enough now. Write what you must but be honest.

You asked me why I liked the art works in Marescot's shop – Monet, Cassatt, Renoir. It might interest you to know that Aline's friend who is always sitting at the end of the bar in Folies-Bergère is one of them – Edgar Degas. We have not heard the last of them. Their paintings inspire a new vision of seeing the world in ways it has never been considered before. Their art will change the world. That is why I admire their paintings.

I trust we will have the opportunity to walk together once again. I cannot promise I will say anything.

Peace be with you,

Henri

* * * * *

George strode down the street to the park and looked out to the hills surrounding the village. Dunant was somewhere out there walking with his demons. He had come from an austere Geneva family, had turned his life to the service of humankind, and in a manner had become a pariah even unto himself, given to living in boarding houses or under bridges. This man had touched George in ways he did not fully understand – he only knew it had happened because he felt altered in his own ways of

thinking. Years ago back in Lennox when he had first read Dunant's memoir of Solferino, it came across as a brilliant idea. But now he had met the idea in the flesh and that changed everything. In the writing of this profile, George decided he would cross the line from being a journalist but to becoming an advocate for Dunant. George believed he could do both.

He was prepared for Conrad's questions and likely objections but he suspected otherwise. He had read many of Conrad's articles on the old soldiers from the many European wars: men broken by hideous nightmares, unable to endure the morning light or the company of others. This is the war wound that has no name but which is as tangible as losing one's legs; that the destruction of minds is not abstract, that it is real and can be seen and is measurable. The paintings in Paris had jarred George's eyes and his time with Dunant had flipped his moral centre. Taking one last look at the mountains, he imaged Henri somewhere in there, and considered he might never see him again.

He boarded a train back to Geneva and wrote the Dunant story the following day in his office at *Die Ostschweiz*. Conrad made several suggestions, all designed to increase the exposure of the article and

published it the following week. The impact was immediate. He and Conrad received requests from newspapers and magazines throughout Europe to reprint the article. George, however, insisted that he wanted the first syndication of the article to be in *The Sentinel*, out of Lennox, Canada.

"Do you mean to say you want it there instead of *Le Monde* or *The London Times*?" said Conrad in a voice that was both insulted and shocked by any other notion. But that was exactly how George wanted it and he won the argument. The Henri Dunant profile appeared in *The Sentinel* a month later under George Lloyd-Craig's byline. Shortly after, George received a telegram from his father:

Wonderful work/ stop/ Everyone reading it /stop /Emma sends her love and questions/ stop/ Keep getting yourself into trouble /stop/ love Samuel /stop.

George was visited by the district's public prosecutor, who asked him several questions about Dunant. A month later, fraud charges against Dunant issued over fifteen years before, were dropped. Some, but not all, of Dunant's creditors also withdrew their bills. The German Red Cross organized a subscription for 'a tribute from the German nation'.

A few weeks later a note arrived from Dunant: he was back in Heiden, "Surviving a whirl wind. Please come for a walk."

When George arrived at the hospice the concierge welcomed him with a slight bow of his head and a smile. This time he escorted George down a hallway where he heard a woman's strident voice coming from one of the rooms. George came to the doorway of Room 12 to see Dunant being scolded by a tall woman wearing a black chiffon dress. The woman turned to George. "This is the writer?" she demanded in a Russian accent.

Dunant affirmed George's guilt and introduced him to Countess Maria Fedorovna. She looked at George with sparkling blue eyes, looking down to him as if he was a commoner. George stepped back, half- expecting a blow. Her face was a stunning display of refined lines, high forehead, curved lips and intelligent authority. "You are a brave man, sir, and you have done the world a great service. You must carry on with that service by convincing this stubborn old mule," flashing her eyes at Dunant, "that he must leave this…this…" looking at the raised eyebrows of the concierge, "this place and inhabit a more hospitable abode more in keeping with his stature."

"I told you I am very comfortable here, Countess," said Dunant.

"A rodent would be comfortable here." She turned back to George. "I implore you, sir. Henri will no longer have to concern himself with money. I am a widow and I want nothing except that he live comfortably."

"I suspect he is comfortable, Countess," said George timidly.

"Wonderful. Two stubborn old mules. Please, for me," she said, kissing George on the cheek and swishing off down the hallway with the concierge in escort.

George stepped into the room. It was perfect simplicity: narrow, sun streaming in, a bed, a chair, a table with several books and notepaper, a view of Lake Constance and no statues covering the sky. George could also see on the table the black box containing the Légion d'honneur medal.

Dunant stood up. "It's good to see you, my friend. I don't know if I should thank you, however. My life, as you see," – gesturing to the Countess - "has been turned somewhat upside down." He took the gold-plated pocket watch from his vest and snapped

it open. "We have some time before the next inquisitor arrives. Come, let us walk."

They took the pathway they had taken many times before, making their way up to the crest of the hill.

"You know I haven't read it," said Dunant with a sly smile.

"So you don't know if I was honest."

"From what I've been told you were," said Dunant with a chuckle.

"What does the Countess want you to do?"

"She wants to put me up in her palace outside Moscow. Can you imagine? *Me* in a palace. It would be an absurd comedy. No, no, I am very content here."

"Will the Countess withdraw her support if you don't?"

"She will huff and puff but no. I am a prize. She is a widow. She needs prizes."

"You have so much more you can do, Henri."

"And I will. I've been offered several projects from the German and French Red Cross."

"But what about the International Committee?"

"Moynier will never relent nor forgive. It doesn't matter. The Red Cross is active in twenty-five countries now, including the United States. My work with it done. No. Sometimes there are some places one must call home."

"Surely you can go back to your family now."

"No," he said firmly. "I decided a long time ago that a man must emancipate himself from the influence of family and from the shackles of religious teaching. My life back there is something I cannot see any longer. It is lost to me. My life, my true life, began for me on the fields of Solferino. To live a meaningful life one must cut the cords of family and find one's own truth not the ones told to you as a child."

"But had you not been a part of that privileged society you would have never been permitted into the halls of power in the first place," George reminded him gently.

"Yes, you're probably right. However, I cannot go back to them. There was a reason why I felt so diminished in their eyes when I lost my fortune. I began to realize that what I had done was foreign to them,

that it had no meaning because it didn't conform. If they could not understand that I was asking everyone to think differently about their fellow man, then they did not understand me. I have learned only two things these past twenty years – help the poor and the wounded, and to pray in private. That is exactly what I intend to do."

They continued along the crest of the hill, over it and down into a deep valley, strolling together for several hours.

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Searching For Henri

Richard Stanford

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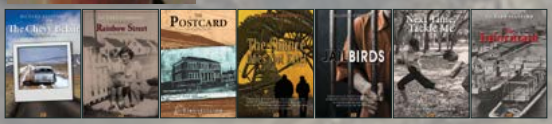
RICHARD STANFORD

Searching For Henri

Richard Stanford, When I'm not writing short stories and essays or producing documentary films in Montréal, I can be found mucking about in my gardens trying to create the perfect eggplant.